

A Content Analysis of Public K-12 Education Response to Serving Special Education Students During COVID:

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Introduction

- Onset of COVID-19 the closing K-12 public schools.
- Impact of virtual learning would have on students with special needs' learning.
- Students who have IEPs require various services
- Special education departments within school districts rely on the guidance from respective state and the federal government
- The goal, identify how COVID-19 impacted K-12 public school special education students' mandated IEP services and the possible solutions schools employed to support these students during the early days of COVID-19 and throughout the 2020-2021 school year.

Problem

Impact COVID-19 on services

K-12 public special education students which are required by Federal and state law.

Restrictions in place for social interaction and personal engagement in closed settings such as schools due to the pandemic.

Compliance issues



Purpose



To gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact COVID-19 may have had on the delivery of services and compliance of IEPs for special education populations in public K-12 U.S. schools.

Research Questions



How were special education students or students identified needing assistance as related to their public K-12 school social experiences and performance impacted in receiving the services mandated by their individual education program (IEP) while schools conducted classes via virtual learning due to COVID-19?

Sub Question 1: How were public K-12 students with an IEP affected by the reduction or loss of mandated services by their service provider or special education teacher during COVID-19

Sub Question 2: What possible solutions were enacted by public K-12 schools to provide services to support students who have an IEP?

Significance of the Study

- Public K-12 educational systems were scrambling to find a means to keep classrooms open virtually to provide students with a meaningful classroom experience.
- Did not adequately address or robustly put into place the required services for their exceptional students and students with special needs.
- The immediacy of special education services were not being addressed.
- Therefore, a disruption occurs in the mandated services these students so desperately need which affects not only the student, but also the special education teachers, paraprofessionals, parents, and caregivers.

Literature Review



- Revealed the extent of how IEP accommodations were and were not met by states within specific regions of the US
- A deeper dive into the literature was needed when formulating the specific problem since the topic of meeting IEP accommodations in K-12 public schools during the time of COVID-19 was still evolving.
- Research was needed to fully understand how the absence of IEP accommodations could affect the educational progress of special education K-12 public school students.

Formulating the Problem

The focus was on the disruptions to service accessibility and delivery for special education populations in K-12 public schools in the United States during the COVID-19 crisis driven closing of schools and emergency pivot to virtual instruction.



- Formulating the problem was conducted by completing a broad, cursory review of the literature as well as public documents and resources.
- A deeper dive is needed on the topic of meeting IEP accommodations in K-12 public schools during the time of COVID-19 was still evolving.

Method and Data Collection

The literature review with content analysis was organized using procedures developed by Cooper (1988) to synthesize the existing literature and supporting documentation.



- Cooper’s method provided structures to develop the problem, collect data, and evaluate the fit of data to the purpose of the study.



Federal, Organizational, and State Level COVID Crisis Response

Official US federal-level communications specific to K-12 Education COVID-19 response-initiated March 12, 2020

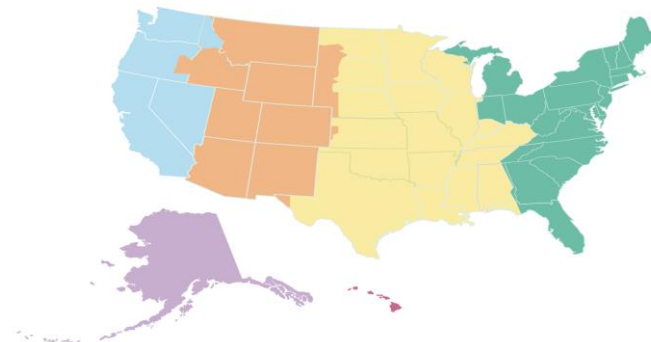
- Guidance for all students without specific recommendations for special education

Professional Organizations provided communications that attempted to fill a national gap in communication

Early state-level communications hinged upon federal response recommendations and varied widely from region to region and state to state

State and Regional Trends

- States took control of communication as federal communications declined
- States unable to present resources to benefit K-12 public schools in a user-friendly way that was easy to navigate and access by all
- Haphazard, Poorly Designed Systems
 - Websites and Communication Networks
 - Placed educators in a position of feeling overwhelmed
 - Could not make sense of what was available to support students with special needs



Five Stages of COVID Impact on K-12 Public School Special Education

Stage 1: Chaos and Closure

First 2-3 weeks, beginning of March 2020

Stage 2: Virtual Pivot Begins

2-4 months through the end of Spring 2020 semester

Stage 3: Preparation for Combined Virtual & F2F Reopening

2-3 months; Summer 2020

Stage 4: Blended Reopening Phase

4-6 months; Fall 2020-Winter 2021

→ First signs that Special Education was an issue which needed to be addressed separate from the general ed population

Stage 5: Full Reopening Phase

2-4 months; Winter 2021-Spring 2021

Stage 1: Chaos and Closure

The pandemic is just emerging (late winter early spring 2020). Concern in the country and around the world is high.



- Limited communications (federal, state, and local districts)
- No direction from federal and state level sources
- School is put on hold/closed (typically for a 2 week period) - hold applies to K-12 and university level showing the extensive nature of the situation
- ALL students are home and without access to educational services

Stage 2 Virtual Pivot Begins

- Patching the digital divide - school systems distributing resources (computers, wifi access, other devices)
- Families are left to play the role of teachers and assist students with their studies in a way that has never occurred before



Stages 3

Preparation for Combined Virtual & F2F Reopening

Communication is established, but variability from district to district makes following difficult. Guidance from the States but the decisions were wholly local - different districts taking different approaches at different times - Achievement Gap Widening?



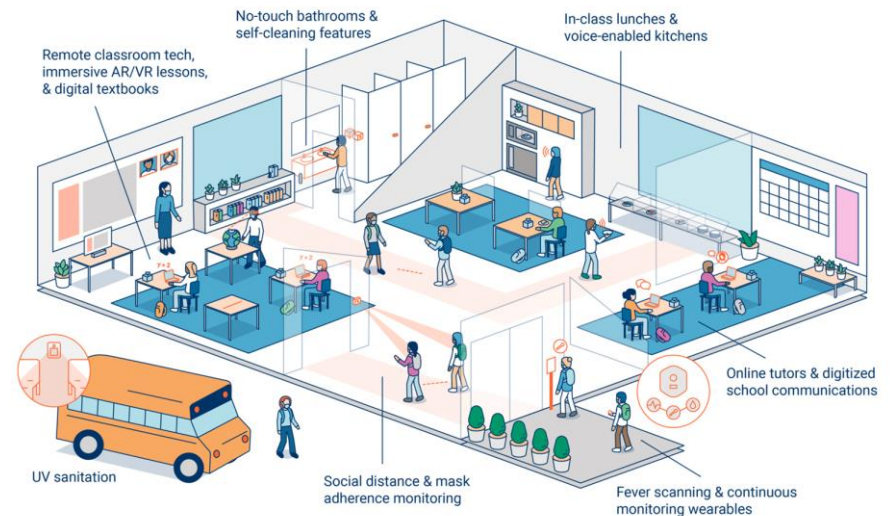
Special Education students are receiving instruction but there is lack of clarity around effectiveness

- *Are IEPs really being met?*
- *Are IEPs being re-written to suit the virtual or hybrid environments?*
- *How are support services accessible?*
- *How are Social, Emotional, Behavioral Functioning services addressed?*

Stage 4 Blended Reopening Phase

States are pumping out resources for teachers on websites - extensive supply of information and support materials

- *Digital Divide looms large*
- *Family Crush persists*
- *SpecEd Service Divide is most evident (general ed students are settled in, SE still struggling to find a place due to difficulties in providing certain services virtually or in inconsistent formats)*
- *Out of sight out of mind - how does delaying F2F reopening influence student progress and response from organizations/government?*



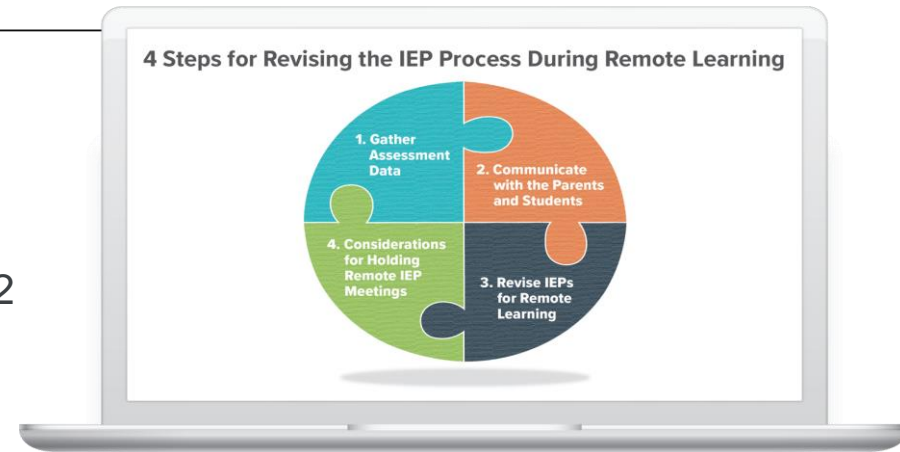
Stage 5 Full Reopening Phase



- *Vast majority of schools are at or near full F2F reopening*
- *Some school systems lag behind in reopening - mostly in large urban areas (New York, Chicago, LA, Atlanta, etc)*
- *What happens when a student or teacher tests COVID-19 positive?*
- *Solutions to opening now and in the future*

Observations & Conclusions

More research may be needed to fully understand how the absence of IEP accommodations could be affecting the educational progress of special education K-12 public school students.



Patterns:

1. South and Central Midwest States moved faster through the stages (Political influence?)
2. States with high urban and/or rural student populations struggled most (Digital Divide?)
3. Money/budgets dictated service and support availability (Fiscal Divide?)
4. SpecEd students left behind until the “whole” could be addressed (Necessity?)
5. State policy dictated school system policy (Top-down governance?)
6. Financial means and access dictate outcomes (More of the same?)
7. Building the plane while it is flying - Tsunami (of data and impact, people & processes)

Recommendations for Future Research

- Investigation of regional differences - East, Central, Mountain, West or more discrete region or urban vs. suburban
- How did closures (long term, rolling etc) affect student performance?
- Virtual vs Hybrid vs F2F student performance and outcomes?
- Mandatory attendance vs. Non-Mandatory attendance states/districts?
- Regression vs. Loss of progress?
- Loss of performance data - gaps in data-driven instructional planning
- How were students in need of services delayed in their access (eligibility, re-eligibility)? (SST)
- Social, Emotional, Behavioral Functioning Losses?
- Does district or parental political affiliation affect the quality of IEP services received?



Questions



Thank you

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